

STUDIES IN THE
OLD TESTAMENT

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OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

Why is this seemingly erotic little book included in the sacred canon? What is its message? Part of the answer is that it speaks of an order of creation that is both pedagogical and eschatological. It speaks of marriage as it ought to be. The Bible does not see marriage as an inferior state, a concession to human weakness. Nor does it see the normal physical love within that relationship as necessarily impure. Marriage was instituted before the Fall by God with the command that the first couple become one flesh. Therefore physical love within that conjugal union is good, is God's will, and should be a delight to both partners (Prov 5:15-19; 1 Cor 7:3).

Dennis F. Kinlaw, "Song of Songs," in *ECC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:1207.

Song of Songs

I. Introduction

A. Title

The Hebrew title for the book is שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים, or "The Song of Songs," a title which is reflected in the LXX and Latin Vulgate. The grammatical construction of the phrase—whereby a singular noun is followed immediately by a definite plural of the same noun—is used in Hebrew to indicate a superlative. In other words, just as the "Holy of Holies" indicated the *most* holy place, so the "Song of Songs" refers to the *best* or *greatest* of songs, or even "the most beautiful of songs." In fact, it has often been translated as "The Best Song." The alternatively familiar title "The Song of Solomon" is based on the assumption of Solomonic authorship. Thus, it assumes that 1:1 refers to Solomon as the author, and it may suggest that this is the very best of the 1,005 songs he is said to have composed (1 Kgs 5:12).

B. Authorship & Date

The traditional view, held by Jewish and Christians scholars for millennia, was that the song was composed by Solomon. This view was founded upon the rather straightforward statement in 1:1, which reads, "The Song of Songs which is of/by Solomon." For most of history, this phrase has been taken as a title for the book as a whole, much like the titles

for psalms and the prophetic books. What's more, Solomon's name appears a total of 7 times throughout the book (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12).

Yet there has been a reluctance to attribute the book to Solomon in recent years. The first stems from the rather recurring penchant of liberal scholars to date biblical books far later than has been held for much of church history. For these individuals, archeological and linguistic discoveries have demonstrated that this book (and others) could not have originated from the Solomonic period. However, much of what liberals held to as "clear" evidence even 100 years ago has been effectively neutralized by current research. Nothing in the language or style of the book *requires* a post-exilic date. As Kinlaw explains, "The very data that for Kaiser made a preexilic origin of the Song impossible now is used to place its origin in or around the time of Solomon."¹

But liberals aren't the only ones who challenge Solomonic authorship. Evangelicals have also questioned the tradition, and they have based their position usually on one of two arguments.

First, some suggest that 1:1 should not be understood to be a title for the book, or at the very least not as a title indicating authorship. For these scholars, the reference to Solomon in 1:1 is not authorial as much as it is thematic. Be it that Solomon is one of the primary characters of the book, the author references him in the title as the overall *topic* of the book: "The Song of Songs which is *about* Solomon." Others hold that the title indicates that the song was written at Solomon's request, or that it was perhaps written to honor him: "The Song of Songs which *belongs to* Solomon," or "The Song of Songs which *is in keeping with the literary legacy of* Solomon."² Despite these alternative views, the overall consensus seems to remain that Solomon authored the book, and that the title in 1:1 most likely indicates authorship, not mere dedication.

Second, and less textually based, many evangelicals seem to have a moral problem with Solomonic authorship. The song, which rejoices in and celebrates the love and sexual relationship of a man and woman in marriage, seems completely at odds with the moral decay of Solomon, whose own marital history was rife with sexual compromise. As Luter comments,

In one regard, though, the argument related to Solomon's marital track record may be the more compelling problem in regard to Solomonic authorship of the Song of Songs. Without question, it is, if nothing else, morally troubling—and may seem almost ridiculous—to think that a man who eventually accumulated seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kgs 11:3) would write a book that focuses on the love between one man and one woman, as does the Song of Songs.³

¹ Dennis F. Kinlaw, "Song of Songs," in *EBC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:1209.

² A. Boyd Luter, *Song of Songs*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).

³ *Ibid.*

This viewpoint holds that Solomon was utterly disqualified to compose such a book, and to hold to Solomonic authorship brings into question the integrity of the book's message as a whole.

Scholars have responded to this moral argument from several angles. First, one must consider passages such as Proverbs 1-9, which is widely accepted as composed by Solomon. Here, the writer lays out wisdom to be followed by his son (1:8; 2:1; 3:1), though it is clear that his son Rehoboam failed to do so (1 Kgs 12:1-17). Within this very section of Proverbs, Solomon lays out the wisdom regarding the exclusivity of marriage (Prov 5:15-20), though we know that Solomon only partially followed these precepts.⁴

Luter's response is clear and straightforward, and drives at the foundation of biblical inspiration:

The key point here is that it was not necessary for a biblical author to be an exemplary figure with regard to the subject matter of the book in question. Under the dynamics of divine inspiration stated and implied by 2 Pet 1:21, the Holy Spirit sovereignly chose particular biblical authors and guided what was said. Relevant examples are Peter, who denied Christ three times, and Paul, who described himself as "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man" (1 Tim 1:13). In addition, the Spirit chose David, the author of many of the psalms, in spite of his adultery and blood-guiltiness (2 Sam 11-12; Pss 32, 51).

The Lord chooses whom He will—sometimes irrespective of what many contemporary readers would consider to be major lifestyle blind spots—to accomplish what He wills. It appears He did exactly that with the flaws of character and practice of Solomon in his authoring of the Song of Songs.⁵

Even apart from a theological defense for Solomonic authorship, the text itself hints at a time of writing which aligns with the conditions in Israel before the kingdom divided. Place names mentioned in the book—Jerusalem, Carmel, Sharon, Lebanon, Engedi, Hermon, and Tirzah—all lie within the boundaries of Israel or territory controlled by Solomon's empire (1 Kgs 5:21, 24), or in regions where frequent trade occurred under Solomon's reign. There is no indication of a division of the kingdom that would have limited travel throughout the empire, and it is highly likely that not only would Solomon have travelled to all these locations during his rule, but that the Shullamite Maiden would have had free access to the locations she references as well.

In addition to geography, the book references items such as perfume, jewelry, precious stones and metals, as well as a host of other exotic items that represents a time of great wealth and exotic tastes. The song also references 21 varieties of plants and 15 animal

⁴ Ibid. Luter points out that while Solomon "apparently married virtually any and all women he desired, whether for pleasure (1 Kgs 11:2) or political advantage (e.g., 3:1; 11:3-8)," there is "no evidence that Solomon ever went after prostitutes."

⁵ Ibid.

species, which “harmonizes perfectly with the massive knowledge of Solomon, who was an expert in such matters” (1 Kgs 4:33).⁶

Thus, while “the case for Solomon’s authorship is not definitive . . . the case against it is equally far from being sure. Arguments for a late dating, which would preclude Solomon-ic authorship, have been largely exploded. Even some liberal critical scholarship is now insisting that the book could have originated in the Solomonic era.”⁷

II. Purpose & Interpretations

Normally, we would discuss the major themes before moving on to summarize the overall purpose and message of a book. But in the case of the Song of Songs, the purpose of the book becomes the avenue for identifying the book’s major themes. What’s more, the purpose itself is itself a lesson in biblical hermeneutics. As it turns out, the interpretive approach we take when reading Song of Songs guides us very clearly to its overall purpose and message.

A. *Interpretative Approaches*

The interpretations offered for Song of Songs are more varied than any other book in the Bible, with maybe the exception of Revelation. To some extent, the reasons for this are understandable. The language in the book is poetic, beautiful, but woefully difficult to translate. It is filled with rare terminology, imagery of ancient cultures, metaphor and other literary devices, and an acute economy of words. “The result is that the text is often more suggestive than delineative, more impressionistic than really pictorial. Much is left to the imagination of the reader rather than spelled out for the curious modern, who wants to know the specific meaning of every detail.”⁸

Yet these challenges aren’t representative of the real issue. In reality, despite the interpretive challenges facing the reader, the overall point of the text has been startlingly clear for millennia. Jewish tradition held that “because of its erotic content, the rabbis forbade the book to be read by anyone under the age of thirty.”⁹ Yet early in church history, a definite negative attitude developed toward marriage and sexuality. Only a few centuries removed from the time of Christ, proposals already sprang up to ban clergy from marital cohabitation. By the end of the 4th century A.D., priests were forbidden from entering into marriage. As Kenlaw observes, “Celibacy reigned as the symbol of supreme piety. . . . Marriage was seen as a concession to human weakness and to the need to continue the human race.”¹⁰

⁶ Mark F. Rooker, “The Book of the Song of Songs,” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 547.

⁷ Kinlaw, “Song of Songs,” 5:1210.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Biblical Lovemaking: A Study of the Song of Solomon* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5:1205-6.

By the time of Augustine, marriage and sexuality had become viewed as that which had been irreparably tainted by the Fall. While marriage was good, it was impossible to engage in sexual intimacy without sinful lust. Under the OT law, marriage was commanded for the perpetuation of humanity. But since Christ had done away with the law, Christians had been freed from these “lesser goods.” In other words, “Celibacy should be urged on all as an escape from the inevitable sin of concupiscence [lust]. Sexuality should be sublimated. Christ should be our Bride. The Song of Songs is a picture of the ecstasy of that better way.”¹¹

This perspective of marriage and sexuality had a direct impact on the development of the allegorical interpretation of Song of Song—the *chief* interpretive approach represented throughout Jewish and Christian history. It was a way of making the book say something *other* than what it really said.¹²

1. *Allegorical Interpretation*

Allegory can be viewed basically as an extended metaphor. It is an interpretive approach that looks for meaning in a text in addition to—or even in replacement of—the historical sense. This hidden meaning is thought of as the “spiritual” meaning behind the text. In the case of Song of Songs, it is the oldest documents interpretive approach to the book.

Jewish allegorical approaches seem to have solidified around A.D. 700-900, and view the book as a depiction of the redemptive history of Israel—the love that Yahweh has for his chosen people. Christian theologians offered similar views, albeit through an obvious Christological lens. For them, the book represented the intense love which Christ has for the church. This view is not only reflected in the writings of early figures such as Origen and Jerome, but also in men such as Luther and John Wesley.

Ultimately, however, the allegorical approach fails as a valid interpretive method. While justification for the approach is made by citing passages where marriage is used as a picture of God’s relationship to his people (Isa 54:4-8; Jer 2:1-2; Ezek 16, 23; Hos 1-3; Eph 5), in each of these instances the writer clearly establishes the meaning of the figure. But in Song of Songs, there are no textual indications. The people, places, and experiences in the story are all real, a factor wholly contrary to the principles observed from ancient allegorical texts.

Yet there are no interpretive controls for the allegorical method, which in turn has led to a vast array of varying allegories which have flowed from the text. As Kinlaw observes, “The result of the use of the allegorical approach is that the Song of Songs has become to an unusual degree a field for fertile imaginations. There have been few or no hermeneutical controls. The boundaries of interpretation have tended to be as wide as the creative fancies of the scholars.”

¹¹ Ibid., 5:1206.

¹² Ibid., 5:1204.

2. *Typological Interpretation*

While the typological approach has often been subsumed under the allegorical approach, some have sought to identify it as a calmer, less over-the-top approach than allegory. Typology, as distinct from allegory, affirms the historical meaning of the text but also identifies people, objects, or events as prefigurements of something greater. Thus, while the allegorical method would deny, or at the very least care little, about the historical events depicted in the book, the typological approach would not be so quick to dismiss the details.

However, the same deficiencies that plague allegory also effect typology. Without clear guidance from the text, it is difficult to see types in Song of Songs that are not racked with subjective influences. Ultimately, the spiritual message of Christ's love for the church wins out over the message of a man and woman's love for each other. "Thus the remaining substantial subjective element in the typological approach to the Song turns out to be little more than an alternative route to hide from the clear meaning expressed in the text."¹³

3. *Dramatic Interpretation*

The dramatic approach sees the book as a work which was intended to be acted out in dramatic fashion. Dating back the time of Origen (A.D. 150-250), it has been interpreted as either a 2-character or 3-character drama. The former is essentially a literal view of the book written in the form of a drama. The latter, however, postulates a third character—a shepherd who is distinct from Solomon. In this view, the Shulammitte maiden desires to be with her shepherd lover, but is being held against her will by the king.

The problems with this latter view are obvious, in that they are completely at odds with a natural reading of the book. Yet as a whole, the book contains little or no criteria to classify as a drama.

4. *Cultic Interpretation*

The cultic approach is based on studies in ANE love poetry and cultic ceremonies where marriage was seen as a depiction of the union of two deities. As Canaanite priests enacted the marriage ceremony, it was thought that it represented what was occurring among the deities, ensuring the production of crops and general wellbeing on the land.

Some liberal scholars have suggested that Song of Songs represents a Hebrew adaptation of this cultic ceremony. Despite the Torah's prohibition against pagan practices, they posit that the book was composed at a time when the pagan associations of these rituals had been forgotten.

Suffice it to say, the cultic interpretation has not made inroads into biblical scholarship outside of liberal circles. Only the most general and vague parallels can be observed between Song of Songs and these ANE cultic ritual texts.

¹³ Luter, *Song of Songs*.

5. *Literal/Natural Interpretation*

Distinct from all the previous interpretive methods, the literal or natural approach aims to understand the book in its most natural way, according to normal grammatical-historical hermeneutics. The result is that the book is viewed as “a depiction of a passionate love relationship between Solomon and a woman who became his wife.”¹⁴ While the allegorical approach as dominated much of church history, the literal approach has had its fair share of proponents, despite the inherent danger that came from holding it. Earlier literal interpretations were condemned and in some cases driven out by the allegorists.

B. *Purpose & Themes*

The discussion about interpretation leads to the purpose and message of the book. There is no question that the variety of figurative and allegorical approaches produced throughout the centuries were a direct result of the church’s discomfort with the through of a book of Scripture being devoted to the topic of marriage and the sexual union. But in the end, when we read and interpret the Song with a natural/literal hermeneutic, there is no question that this is the topic at hand.

1. *Sexual Love*

Clearly, the Song of Songs highlights and rejoices in the sexual love of a man and woman. Kinlaw writes, in sharp contrast to the ancient church, love and sexuality within marriage is presented as something good, right, and holy:

The Bible does not see marriage as an inferior state, a concession to human weakness. Nor does it see the normal physical love within that relationship as necessarily impure. Marriage was instituted before the Fall by God with the command that the first couple become one flesh. Therefore physical love within that conjugal union is good, is God’s will, and should be a delight to both partners (Prov 5:15-19; 1 Cor 7:3).¹⁵

One can scour the Bible to find passages which address marriage and sexuality, but in reality, only two deal with the topic in any detail. Genesis 1:26-28 introduce humanity as God’s creation, made in his image, and created as male and female, with the charge to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (1:28), a general reference to the sexual relationship they would have in marriage. In 2:24, mention is made of the one-flesh union that would uniquely characterize the relationship between a man and his wife.

In Proverbs 5:15-20, that same union is discussed from a different yet complementary perspective, as the writer calls his son to marital fidelity by adjuring him to find his sexual satisfaction in the marital union, as opposed to outside of it. The language, though figurative, clearly reflects the attendant realities of pleasure and fulfillment that come with the marital union.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kinlaw, “Song of Songs,” 5:1207.

Song of Songs, on the other hand, develops these themes at an even greater level. It is a kind of commentary on these passages—a digging out of the concept of the marital union and a celebration of the love, both emotional and physical, between a man and woman. Scholars have even noted that the colorful garden imagery which is pervasive throughout the Song may even intentionally draw the reader back to the garden, back to the first marital union, back to how marriage should be. Kinlaw comments,

The prospect of children is not necessary to justify sexual love in marriage. Significantly, the Song of Solomon makes no reference to procreation. It must be remembered that the book was written in a world where a high premium was placed on offspring and a woman's worth was often measured in terms of the number of her children. Sex was often seen with reference to procreation; yet there is not a trace of that here. The Song is a song of praise of love for love's sake and for love's sake alone. This relationship needs no justification beyond itself.¹⁶

Echoing these words, Luter writes,

The purpose of the Song of Songs would be partly for Solomon to rejoice in his relationship. However, the presence in the Song of a number of reasonably clear echoes of the earliest chapters of Genesis infer that, even in employing a well-known ANE literary genre, "the finest of the songs that belong to Solomon" was intentionally crafted to portray God's perspective on the romantic and sexual love between a man and woman. No other extended treatment of this subject, introduced as early in Scripture as the conclusion of the creation accounts (Gen 2:24-25) as a major aspect of man and woman coming together in marriage, is found elsewhere in the whole of Scripture. That is indeed a worthy purpose for the composition of the Song of Songs.¹⁷

Luter goes on to point out that, taken from a standard literary perspective, the Song may seem to be non-theological or even atheological, in that it didactically addresses a subject like no other book of Scripture does. "However," he writes, "upon further reflection, that is exactly the theological point: the Song of Songs *uniquely* describes that side of male-female relations!"¹⁸

2. *Marriage-Related Love*

Virtually every scholar who holds to the unity of the work identifies 4:16-5:1 (the physical consummation of the relationship between the man and woman) as the dramatic climax of the entire book. Lest one conclude that the book is nothing more than a divinely written book celebrating sex, it must be observed that the book's core message moves beyond the mere physical union. It is, indeed, a celebration and exploration of *marital* sexuality. Paul House writes, "Desire will be united with sexual inti-

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. Emphasis his.

macy, but only a public profession of commitment seals the union with [Solomon's] intended."¹⁹ Luter also comments that

The key point here is that the central theological focus of the Song of Songs is not just love, particularly love of a sexual nature. Instead, the overarching theological focus of the Song is love and desire that has these characteristics: *it is headed toward marriage* (1:2-3:5), *it involves making a very public commitment and having a very private consummation* (3:6-5:1), *and it includes working through the "growing pains" of a marriage relationship—including "baggage" brought into the marriage and tensions which develop within the marital bond* (5:2-8:14).²⁰

The final characteristic is a key facet of the book. The marital relationship depicted in the song is not devoid of trouble and conflict. It is a very real representation of "the bloom of youthful infatuation (Song 1-2)" as well as the "selfishness (5:2-4) and disappointment (5:5-8) of 'real life'."²¹ In other words, it depicts marriage in light of love in a fallen world.

3. *Monogamous Marital Commitment*

One reality of the fallen world which was of major concern in Solomon's day is the reality of polygamy. In his article, "The Message of the Song of Songs," Paul Tanner identifies a number of textual clues that indicate the presence of these issues:

- "hints of tension" between the Shulammitte and Solomon in the parallel dream sequences (Song 3:1-5/5:2-8)
- Contextual implications of the wording "the little foxes that are ruining the vineyards" (2:15)
- The reality behind Solomon mentioning "the 60 queens and 80 concubines and maidens without number" (6:8)
- The possible *additional* role of "the daughters/young women of Jerusalem/Zion" in the Song (1:5; 2:7; 3:5, 11; 5:8; 6:1; 8:4)

Each of these elements builds a "thoroughly plausible case" for "the true nature of the Song of Songs as representing the challenge of the ongoing development of an exclusive love relationship between Solomon and the Shulammitte against the pervasive—and thus highly problematic—backdrop of the polygamy of Solomon's royal lineage following David."²² As Tanner explains in his own words,

Solomon was a man of many lovers, and the Song of Songs is a record of one of the relationships that stood out above all others. A fiery love developed between Solomon and the unnamed Shulammitte woman referred to as the bride. Their background was remark-

¹⁹ Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 466.

²⁰ Luter, *Song of Songs*.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

ably diverse.... He had known many women (nor had his father David been monogamous), whereas she had been kept a virgin under the careful scrutiny of her brothers.

Solomon could offer her a life in the royal courts, but she had something much greater to offer him. She could teach him about a godly love based on commitment, a love that needed to be mutually exclusive to experience its highest attainment. Such love was costly (8:7). It was more than money could buy, more than even Solomon was capable of. So, she becomes the heroine of the book, and she (rather than Solomon) renders the moral homily in the book's conclusion.

Unfortunately Solomon followed the way of many worldly kings, establishing a large harem to propagate a large royal lineage. As a result too many women...were vying for his attention. She made an earnest attempt to love him in such a context, but she knew there was a higher level to which their relationship could ascend if only they could be exclusively each other's. That is what led her to request, "Put me like a seal over your heart" (8:6)... She was prepared to be exclusively his. He, however, had a great obstacle to overcome. He needed to recognize the detrimental effect his lifestyle imposed on the development of their relationship.²³

Not all scholars see this aspect in the book, but Tanner nonetheless offers a rather convincing perspective of the Song that illuminates the real-life realities of the marital union in a fallen world and points to the sexual relationship between man and woman as one which is truly good and desirable within the confines of monogamous marital commitment.

4. *Summary*

To summarize the book's overall purpose, we could say that the Song of Songs in its most basic sense *celebrates the marital joy experienced by the man and the woman*.

When we consider the final point regarding monogamous marriage, we could articulate the purpose further by saying that "*God's gift of romantic love can continue to be 'almost paradise,' if both lovers are fully committed.*"²⁴

III. Literary Structure

Even a cursory reading of the Song of Songs will evidence a striking sense of unity within the book. The careful reader will quickly note the repetition of certain key words and phrases: "My love" (1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4); "Bride" (4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 5:1); "Sister" (4:12; 5:1, 2); "My beloved" (1:13, 14, 16; 2:3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 4:6; 5:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16; 6:2, 3; 7:9, 10, 11, 13; 8:14); "The Daughters of Jerusalem" (2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4); "The King" (1:4, 12; 3:9, 11); "Solomon" (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12); "A Shepherd" (1:7; 2:16; 6:3); "A Garden" (4:12, 15, 16; 5:1; 6:2); "Wine" (1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:2, 9; 8:2).

By themselves, the repetition of these words and phrases at the very least suggest a cyclical structure to the work. In addition, there seems to be an obvious flow from pre-marriage (1:1-3:5) to wedding day/night (3:6-5:1) to post-wedding (5:2-8:14).

²³ J.P. Tanner, "The Message of the "Song of Songs," *BSac* 154 (1997): 160-61.

²⁴ Luter, *Song of Songs*.

As of late, scholars have begun to notice the remarkable unity of the work—a unity that goes far beyond what one might expect. Completely contrary to the older attempts to break apart the book into a series of love songs strung together by a later postexilic redactor, there appears to be a clear literary unity seen in repeated and paralleling of terms and concepts. Alden has provided a chiasmic structure of the work based on these parallels, and as Luter observes, “It stretches credulity beyond any reasonable point to believe that the extent of the following parallels could possibly occur in a document that is not a highly intentional unity.”²⁵

- A (1:1-4a) “Take me away”
- B (1:4b) Friends speak
- C (1:5-7) “My own vineyard”
- D (1:8-14) “Breasts,” “silver,” “we will make”
- E (1:15-2:2) “Love,” “house”
- F (2:3-7) “His left arm,” “daughters of Jerusalem...so desires,” “apple,” “love”
- G (2:8-13) “Fragrance,” “come my darling,” “blossoming”
- H (2:14-15) “Vineyards,” “show me”
- I (2:16-17) “My lover is mine”
- Ja (3:1-5) “The watchmen found me”
- Jb (3:6-11) “Gold,” “Lebanon,” “daughters of Jerusalem”
- Jc (4:1-6) Description of girl, “your eyes...hair...teeth”
- K (4:8-15) “Myrrh,” “spice,” “honey,” “honeycomb,” “wine,” “milk”
- L (4:16) “Into his garden”
- L’ (5:15a) “Into my garden”
- K’ (5:1c) “Myrrh,” “spice,” “honey,” “honeycomb,” “wine,” “milk”
- J’a (5:2-9) “The watchmen found me”
- J’b (5:10-6:1) “Gold,” “Lebanon,” “daughters of Jerusalem”
- J’c (6:4-11) Description of girl, “your eyes...hair...teeth”
- I’ (6:2-3) “My lover is mine”
- H’ (6:13-7:9a) “Vines,” “wine,” “that we may gaze on you”
- G’ (7:9b-13) “Fragrance,” “come my darling,” “blossom”
- F’ (8:1-5) “His left arm,” “daughters of Jerusalem...so desires,” “apple,” “love”
- E’ (8:6-7) “Love,” “house”
- D’ (8:8-9) “Breasts,” “silver,” “we will build”
- C’ (8:10-12) “My own vineyard”
- B’ (8:13) “Friends”
- A’ “Come away”

While the chiasmic parallels are obvious, it does not completely clarify how these all relate to a macro-structure of the work. However, several recent attempts have been made to capture the unity and overall chiasmic structure of the work, such as the outline suggested by David Dorsey:

²⁵ Ibid.

- A (1:1-2:7) Opening words of mutual love and desire
- B (2:8-17) The young man's invitation to join him in the countryside
- C (3:1-5) The young woman's first nighttime search for the young man
- D (3:6-5:1) *Their wedding day and night*
- C' (5:2-7:11) The young woman's second nighttime search for the young man
- B' (7:12-8:4) The young woman's invitation to join her in the countryside
- A' (8:5-14) Closing words of mutual love and desire

Dorsey also notes a number of unifying features of the structure. For instance, not only does each new section begin with a change in perspective, but each opens with tension based on the separation of the lovers, which is later resolution at the close as the couple reunite. Other correspondences are evident as well. Rooker has offered a similar arrangement of the work which not only captures the unified chiasmic structure but also provides a memorable outline for students.²⁶ What is important to observe is that in all the proposed outlines for the work, there is an appropriate identification of the wedding day/night (3:6-5:1) as the central focus of the book:

- A. Love is Anticipated (1:2-2:7)
- B. Found, and Lost—and Found (2:8-3:5)
- C. Love Is Consummated (3:6-5:1)
- D. Lost—and Found (5:2-8:4)
- E. Lost is Affirmed (8:5-14)

²⁶ Rooker, "Song of Songs," 551.